

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17134

FOLLOWING TEL CALCUTTA 304 DTD 23 DEC 75 RCVD NW DELHI
BEING REPEATED TO YOU. QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 3049

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: SHIFT IN THE POLITICAL WINDS IN WEST BENGAL

1. THE POLITICAL SCENE IN WEST BENGAL HAS UNDERGONE A MARKED CHANGE IN RECENT WEEKS. THIS HAS MANY FACETS BUT THE MOST STRIKING IS THAT IT IS NOW PERMISSIBLE, IF NOT YET FASHIONABLE, FOR CONGRESS POLITICIANS AND THE PRESS TO ATTACK THE CPI. GONE AND FORGOTTEN ARE THE SLOGANS OF CONGRESS/CPI JOINT ACTION WHICH WERE SO MUCH IN VOGUE IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER. THE EMPHASIS NOW IS ON THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS ALONE AND PARTY LEADERS ARE DECLARING THAT THEY HAVE NO CURRENT PLANS TO UNDERTAKE JOINT PROGRAMS WITH OTHER GROUPS. LEFTIST CONGRESS ELEMENTS AND THE CPI ARE OPENLY CRITICIZED FOR HAVING EARLIER EXERCISED A DIVISIVE INFLUENCE IN THE PARTY. THIS CRITICISM IS NOT YET WIDESPREAD BUT IT HAS BEEN VERY NOTICEABLE.

2. THE NEW ATMOSPHERE APPEARS TO STEM LARGELY FROM SANJAY GANDHI'S INTERVENTION IN WEST BENGAL CONGRESS POLITICS AND THE SUPPORT THAT HE HAS GIVEN HIS FRIENDS IN THE ANTI-CPI FACTION OF THE PARTY. BARID BARAN DAS' APPOINTMENT ON DECEMBER 11 AS PRES-
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IDENT OF THE WEST BENGAL YOUTH CONGRESS, REPLACING LEFTIST LEANING

SUDIP BANNERJEE, SIGNALLED THE CHANGE BUT APPARENTLY IT HAS BEEN IN THE MAKING FOR SOME MONTHS NOW, AT LEAST SINCE SANJAY FORCED P.R. DAS MUNSHI OUT OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE ALL INDIA YOUTH CONGRESS LATE IN OCTOBER. THE MEN WE HEAR ARE RISING IN INFLUENCE AND STATURE IN THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS THESE DAYS ARE ALL IDENTIFIED WITH SANJAY AND ARE ALL KNOWN FOR THEIR ANTIPATHY TO THE CPI. MOST PROMINENT AMONG THEM ARE GOWB MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOOD PRAFULLA KANTI GHOSH, WHOM WE ARE TOLD IS PROBABLY NOW
O
THE SINGLE MOST POWERFUL FIGURE IN THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS, AND LAKSHMI KANTA BOSE, A PROMINENT YOUTH LEADER. BOTH HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF BATTLING THE CPI AND THE CPM IN PAST ELECTORAL CONTESTS AND GHOSH SENT ONE OF HIS DAUGHTERS TO LIVE IN THE US DURING THE DAYS OF NAXALITE TERROR AND HAS ANOTHER WHO IS A PERMANENT RESIDENT OF THE US.

3. WE ARE SURPRISED AT THE EASE WITH WHICH SANJAY AND HIS BACKERS IN WEST BENGAL HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE OVER THE PARTY MACHINERY AND THE RELATIVE ABSENCE OF OPPOSITION THUS FAR. MOST OF THE MAIN FIGURES OF THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS HAVE LITERALLY RUSHED TO GET ON THE BANDWAGON. P.R. DAS MUNSHI IS THE ONLY ONE WHO HAS STAYED AWAY; THE ONLY MAJOR FIGURE TO HESITATE WAS GOWB MINISTER OF INFORMATION SUBRATA MUKERJEE BUT IT APPEARS THAT HE HAS NOW THROWN IN HIS LOT WITH THE NEW GROUP. THE SOLE EXPRESSION OF OPPOSITION THAT WE HAVE HEARD OF SO FAR IS BRIEF PAMPHLET PUT OUT IN THE NAME OF THE PRESIDENCY COLLEGE STUDENT COUNCIL ABOUT A WEEK AGO CRITICIZING SANJAY (CALCUTTA 3001). VIOLENCE WAS EXPECTED BUT THERE HAS BEEN NONE YET, APPARENTLY BECAUSE DAS MUNSHI AND HIS FOLLOWERS KNOW THAT THEY WILL BE HIT VERY HARD BY CONGRESS YOUTHS GANGS IF THEY GET OUT OF LINE (A POLICE SOURCE TELLS US THAT IF THERE IS VIOLENCE IT WILL ALL BE ONE SIDED, BY THE ANTI-CPI LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY AGAINST THE LEFTISTS). CHIEF MINISTER RAY APPEARS NOW MORE THAN EVER ON HIS WAY OUT, ALTHOUGH HE HAS BEEN MAKING WHAT MANY VIEWS AS A DESPARATE EFFORT TO INGRATIATE HIMSELF WITH MRS. GANDHI AND SANJAY. ASHOKE KUMAR SEN, MEMBER OF THE LOK SABHA AND A BITTER ENEMY OF RAY'S IS RUMORED TO BE THE MAIN CANDIDATE TO REPLACE RAY. SEN IS SAID TO BE HESITATING ONLY BECAUSE HE HAS A HISTORY OF HEART DISEASE, BUT PRESS CARRIES AN ACCOUNT OF REMARKS MADE TO HIM AND BY HIM AT A RECEPTION IN CALCUTTA ON DECEMBER 22 WHICH SEEM TO MEAN THAT HE IS NOW READY
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TO ACCEPT. RUMOR HAS IT THAT RAY WILL DEPART SOME TIME IN JANUARY.

4. THE CPI APPEARS TO BE TAKING ALL THIS IN SILENCE. KALANTAR HAS VIRTUALLY IGNORED THE RECENT UPHEAVAL IN THE WEST BENGAL CONGRESS; IT CONTINUES TO REGALE ITS READERS WITH ACCOUNTS OF THE FAILURE OF THE PARIS CONFERENCE AND THE CONSPIRACIES OF THE U.S. IN ANGOLA, BUT NOT A WORD OF COMMENT ON WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ITS

ONCE VALUED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONGRESS PARTY. THIS SILENCE IS OPEN TO VARYING INTERPRETATIONS BUT IT APPEARS THAT THE CPI HAS NO PLACE TO GO FOR THE MOMENT. IT HAS GROWN IN NUMBERS IN RECENT YEARS AND, WE ARE TOLD, NO LONGER HAS THE TYPE OF ORGANIZATION THAT CAN READILY GO UNDERGROUND. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE CPM HAS BEEN IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING UNDERGROUND THESE PAST WEEKS. THE CPI MAY SIMPLY BE WAITING AND HOPING FOR BETTER TIMES SOON.

5. THOUGH THEY ARE BLOWING HEAVILY IN FAVOR OF THE CONGRESS MODERATES NOW AND AGAINST THE CPI AND ITS FRIENDS IN CONGRESS, THERE IS NO ASSURANCE THAT THE WINDS WILL NOT SHIFT AGAIN AFTER A TIME. THE CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE ARE TOO RECENT, AND HAVE COME TOO SUDDENLY, FOR THERE TO BE CERTAINTY IN THEIR PERMANENCE. RIGHT NOW, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT WHO IS ON TOP.

6. APPROACHES TO THE CONGEN AND USIS BY CONGRESS OFFICIALS (CALCUTTA 3006 AND 3044) ARE SIGNS OF THE NEW TIMES. WE INTEND TO PLAY THESE VERY CAUTIOUSLY AND BELIEVE CONGEN AND USIS SHOULD KEEP LOW PROFILE STANCE. WE HAVE NOT SOUGHT CONTACT WITH ANY OF THE NEW LEADERSHIP OF CONGRESS AND WHILE WE CANNOT TURN AWAY FRIENDLY OVERTURES WE INTEND TO AVOID ANYTHING THAT HINTS OF INVOLVEMENT, WHICH WOULD BE KISS OF DEATH FOR THE NEW MODERATE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP AND WOULD GAIN THE CONGEN NOTHING BUT CONTROVERSY.
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